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# SOME MEXICAN VERSIONS OF THE "BRER RABBIT" STORIES.

THE following stories form part of a collection of folk-tales made during a summer spent in the City of Mexico. They were taken down word for word from the mouths of Indians (of more or less mixed blood), who, however, spoke the language of the country. The fact that these stories were dictated, will account for the condensed form of narration in the specimens here given, for the writer has deemed it expedient to transmit them as received, not even correcting the most obvious syntactical errors.

The two features which render the Mexican stories of especial interest to students of American folk-lore are, in the first place, that it is the rabbit who deceives the other animal (the *coyote*); in the second place, that the means employed in accomplishing this deception, corresponds to those used by the rabbit in the negro stories of the South. I am unable to say to what extent these stories are current in Mexico, but the four specimens which follow are known in Puebla, Mexico City and Guajalato.

I. Est'era un Coyote y un Conejo. Andaba el Conejo buscando que comer en el campo. Lo vió el Coyote y le dijo que se lo iba comer, y el Conejo le suplicó que no, que le prometería tráirle una gayina pa que se la comiera. Y él (el coyote) le dijo que se la juera tráir, que lo esperaba ayí. Se jué el Conejo y no iso a presio á yevarle la gayina.

Luego qu'el Coyote se fastidió d'estar esperando el Conejo, se jué á buscarlo y lo incontró y le dijo: "Ora si te como porque m'engañaste." Y le dijo él: "No t'engañé si no me dijeron que tuviera esta peña, porque si la soltaba si acabaría el mundo. Tenla tú, mientras que yo voy á tráirle que comas." El Coyote se quedó teniendo la peña. Luego que ya cansó d'estar teniéndola, dijo: "Yo la voy á soltar; no me importa que si acabe el mundo." Se jué á buscar al Conejo.

The deception practiced on the Coyote is brought out more clearly in the following explanatory passage, which occurs in another version of the same story: "Y como ese tiempo estaban pasando las nubes en el aire, pensaba (el coyote) que venía la peña ensima, pero como no er'así, el Conejito le dise al Coyote: "Atranca usté fuerte, mientras voy á tráir el desayuno." Se quedó el Coyote atracado en

la peña."

It is strange that folk-lore has not made more frequent use of the startling effect produced by clouds passing over a tall rock or tree. There may, however, be a suggestion of it in the Kaffir tale of the Leopardess who runs under a large rock and cries out to her pursuer "Do you not see the rock falling." In "Daddy Jack's" story, the rabbit fleeing from the wolf, becomes so tired that he runs under a leaning tree and calls to the wolf to hold it while he (the rabbit) props it up. Here the use of a *leaning* tree makes it evident that the phenomenon of passing clouds had no part in the deception. There is in Mexico a saying more or less common, which is used in regard to a person who has been badly fooled: "Tu quedas como el coyote atracando la peña."

II. El mezmó Conejo estaba ensima di un nopal y lo incontró el Coyote. Le dise: "Amigo, qu'estás asiendo?"—"Tio, dise el Conejito, aquí comiendo tunas"—"Ora te tengo ganas de comerte"—"Pero porqué Tio?"—"Porque me dejaste atracando la peña."—"Ay! Tio, no soy yo; somos siete ermanos, uno d'eyos abrá sido, yo no."—"Pero, sí, te tengo ganas de comerte"—"No Tio, voy á darle á usté una tuna. Sierra usté los ojos y abre la boca." Entonses se pone el Coyote con la boca abierta y el Conejito li avienta un puño d'espinas y corre.

A variant of this story omits the point that there are seven brothers, and that it must have been one of the other six who played the former trick on the *Coyote*.

III. Estaba el Conejito sentado debajo di un árbol tejiendo una rede, cuando yegó el Coyote. El Coyote le dise: "Amigo, pide perdon, porque tengo ambre; quero comer carne." El Conejo le dise: "Ay! Tio, es vigilia, la carne flaca no engordai." El Coyote dise: "Tú ti as burlado de mí."—"Tio, no l'echo nada; serán mis ermanos, que no si acuerda usté que somos siete ermanos?" Quen sabe quen d'eyos hiso asté el mal! Venga usté, vamos á tejér esta rede y acá nos metemos porque oy va venir un deluvio y una granizada de piedras"—"Sí, dise el Coyote, te voy ayudar."

Empesaron á tejér la rede. En canto si acabó, le dijo el Conejo al Coyote: "Tio, suba usté al árbol y yo le daré asté la lia y amarra usté bien á la rama, mientras yo amarro acá á la rede." Se subió el Coyote al árbol y el Conejo quedó abajo. Entonses el Conejo le

1 *Uncle Remus*, p. xvii.

dise: "Tío, baja usted y métase á la rede porque va empesar á cáir granisada."

Se baja el Coyote y se mete á la rede y el Coyote jala el mecate y si apretó muy bien la rede donde el Coyote s'enserró; y empeisa el Coneja á echarle piedras. Entonses el Coyote empieza gritar "Ay! Ay! me muero!" El Conejo dise: "muerase usted, ora es vigilia, coma uste carne asta donde se yena." Y echándole mas piedras asta que se privó el Coyote, y corrió el conejo.

In a variant of this story the Rabbit calls Mr. Man and gets him to make two bags. He then puts the *Coyote* in one of them, hangs him up the tree and gets the man to beat him. By using this variant, there is a more striking resemblance to Uncle Remus' story in which Mr. Man catches Brer Rabbit and hangs him up the tree to await punishment. The Rabbit however, gets out by persuading the Opossum to get in and hear angels sing. The man of course returns and beats the Opossum.

IV. El Conejo estaba en un carrisal. Yega el Coyote y le dise: "Sobrino, qu'estás asiendo aqui."—"Ah, Tío, oy es un día de fandango; se caso mi hermano el mayor y ay nesidá de formar un baile, y quero tambien disponer di un música. Quere usted acompañarme á componer un violin? Usted tiene buen pecho pa cantar; usted con el violin con la vos alta y yo con el violin bajo, y acemos una armonía."

Agarra el Coyote dos carrisos y ase una flauta y el Conejito le dise: "Aguardame usted, voy alcansar á los novios y así que oiga usted, está que mando cuetes, empieza usted á tocar la flauta." Se va el Conejito y coje un pedaso de pajuela y prende en la lumbre y empieza á quemar el carrisal. Trena los carrisos y empieza el Coyote á tocar un armonía de Petenera, bailando. Cuando se li asercó la lumbre todo alrededor, entonses quiso salir, y tiro la flauta, se metió al juego y salio chamuscado, y el conjo corrió.

This idea of surrounding an unsuspecting enemy by fire, occurs in two of Uncle Remus' stories. In the first it is the Terrapin who is fooled by the Fox, and in the second entitled "why the Aligator's back is rough," the Aligator is fooled by the Rabbit. The Mexican version adds a new element, in that the *Coyote* does not suspect trouble when he first hears the crackling of the flames, for the Rabbit had led him to believe that it was fire-works (*cuetes*) in honor of the wedding.

The four *cuentos* related above will serve to illustrate the general character of the Mexican Rabbit-stories. Doubtless many more exist,

and my own collection numbers eleven including variants. In addition to these there are many stories in which the rabbit does not figure, but which bear a marked resemblance to some of the other Remus-tales.

It is worthy of note that the four stories here given were also related to me by an old inhabitant of Guanajuato who substituted the fox (*Zorra*) for the rabbit.

As to the origin of these stories, nothing definite can be said. They may be indigenous, they may be borrowed from the negroes of Texas and other Southern States, they may represent folk-lore of the West Indies, or they may be popular versions of the European collections which were introduced by the Spaniards. But whichever of these theories be the true one, it is evident that no definite origin can be assigned to the negro stories of the South, until there has been a careful collection and study of the Mexican versions. In the meantime I offer the present article as a small contribution to the existing folk-lore material.

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#### AN EARLY GERMAN EDITION OF ÆSOP'S FABLES.

AMONG the more valuable books of the large collection bequeathed to the Johns Hopkins University by the late John W. McCoy, is an edition of *Æsop's Fables* translated into German by the celebrated Dr. Hainricus Stainhöwel. The *editio princeps* of this collection of fables appears to be that printed at Ulm by Johannes Zeiner about the year 1475, a folio volume of 288 leaves, containing both the Latin text and Stainhöwel's German translation. This work was frequently reprinted during the fifteenth century and the edition here described is undoubtedly a reprint of the German text alone, a policy first instituted, it seems, by Guentherus Zainer in his folio edition of 167 leaves, printed probably at Augsburg about 1480. There were also other editions of the same German text by various printers, and hence the most that can be claimed for the present one is that it is the oldest edition whose date is certain.